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A Record Year for Church Growth.

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STATISTICAL REPORT

of Seventh-day Adventist® Conferences, Missions, and Institutions Throughout the World for the Year Ending December 31, 2015 (including year-end membership statistics for 2016)

ABOUT THIS REPORT: THE CHALLENGE OF THE 10/40 WINDOW

About this Edition of the ASR. This is the 153rd annual report of Seventh-day Adventist statistics. It reports membership and congregational statistics as of December 31, 2016, and institutional, financial, and personnel statistics as of December 31, 2015. Because the Global Mission Tables draw on a combination of membership, congregational, and personnel statistics, those tables (pp. 86–91) report data from 2015. The report includes color charts illustrating key statistics and statistical trends (pp. 5–6 and 99), as well as the color map of the 10/40 Window (p. 92).

A Growing Church. 2016 was a landmark year for Adventist church growth: the total of **1,356,476** people who became Seventh-day Adventists by baptism and profession of faith was **a new record for total accessions** in a calendar year, surpassing the previous record total—set in 2015! This was the fifteenth year in all and the thirteenth year in succession in which more than a million new members joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church; it was also the first year in which the number of baptisms (1,271,305) exceeded 1.25 million. Throughout the year, on average, one new person joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church every 23.26 seconds, an average of 154.74 accessions every hour.

To measure church growth fully, it is also necessary to consider losses (see “Membership Audits,” below) and to compare Adventist growth to that of the population at large. The population to church member ratio worldwide continues to improve, as shown in chart 8: at the end of 2015, there were 26.06 Seventh-day Adventists for every 10,000 people in the world (or 383 people for every Seventh-day Adventist). These global figures mask considerable variations in different regions of the world (as discussed below: “The 10/40 Window”) but church growth, worldwide, continues to exceed the growth in the world’s population.

The pace of church growth, and how it has accelerated in recent years, is evident from chart 9, which shows how many years it has taken to add each half million of members (which takes into account losses, as well as accessions). It was only after nearly eighty years that the denomination passed the half million mark, but in the last thirteen years membership has increased from 13.5 million to more than 20 million: adding thirteen half millions in ten years.

Growing Churches. Another area of significant growth is in local congregations (churches and companies); successful church planting is a major cause of growth in church membership. Chart 2 illustrates the numbers of new congregations organized each year over the past five years. The 2016 total of 3,249 is the ninth highest recorded in a year. Looking only at the number of new local churches (*i.e.*, not including companies), the total of 2,655 organized in 2016 is the second-highest ever annual total, just behind the record figure set the previous year, in 2015.

Membership Audits. The impact of the world church’s program of membership audits is now being seen in some divisions’ statistical reports, with the welcome result that membership figures are more reliable. Yet audits will need to continue, because, as noted in my report to the 2015 GC Session and in the preface to last year’s ASR, a range of data indicate that many territories’ membership statistics are still overstated. One of the key metrics used in reaching this conclusion is the *mortality rate*: the number of deaths per thousand people in a population. By comparing Adventist mortality rates with those of the whole population of any given territory, one can get a good sense of whether the reported membership is credible. Chart 1 shows Adventist mortality as a percentage of general mortality rates in each of the church’s thirteen world divisions and two attached fields. As well as revealing that, in many divisions, the Adventist mortality rate is far lower than the general mortality rate, it also shows that the percentages for IAD and WAD rose considerably in 2015—this was thanks to the audits conducted in their territories. The percentage in WAD continued to improve in 2016. We look forward to the day when all unions, worldwide, complete audits; when they do, we anticipate that mortality rates for all divisions will be

more realistic, which would mean greater confidence in the accuracy of reported membership statistics.

The 10/40 Window. The “10/40 Window” (see map on p. 92) is a missiological concept that identifies the parts of the world that are least evangelized by Christianity, where rival world religions are strongest, and where there tend to be particular issues relating to religious liberty, poverty, and related socioeconomic and cultural factors. All these combine to make church growth very difficult. Since the early 1990s, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has prioritized the 10/40 Window. It is appropriate, then, to take stock of how we are doing, and charts 3–7 illustrate the global progress of the “great Second Advent movement.” As chart 4 shows, the great majority of the world’s people live inside the 10/40 Window—yet the reverse remains true for Adventist church members. The difficulties faced in evangelizing in the 10/40 Window mean this is probably inevitable but the sheer scale of dissonance between the distribution, on the one hand, of the world’s population (chart 4) and, on the other, of Seventh-day Adventist congregations (chart 5), ministers (chart 6), and members (chart 7) is very striking. Looking at these charts, one can grasp immediately that the Adventist proportions in the 10/40 Window are roughly in inverse proportion to those of the world’s population as a whole. It is striking, too, not only that the percentage of Seventh-day Adventist church members inside the 10/40 Window is relatively low, but also that the millions of church members we have there (see Global Mission table 3) themselves make up a small proportion of the population of those countries. Chart 8 was discussed above, but it also illustrates how the ratio of Adventists to population is eleven times better outside the 10/40 Window than it is inside; with the figure for the 10/40 Window countries less than a quarter of the global average. There is still much to do if the billions who live in the 10/40 Window are to be reached with the good news of Jesus and the prophetic truths of the angels of Revelation 14.

A Global Church. The days when church membership was largely in North America, Western Europe and Australasia are long gone. Much more needs to be done to reach West Africa, North Africa and the Middle East, East Asia, much of Southern Asia and Southeast Asia, and the great cities of Europe, in all of which ratios of members to population are very poor. We should recognize (and thank God) for the extraordinary growth in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa and some parts of Southeast Asia in the last fifty years. This growth is illustrated in chart 3, which illustrates the distribution of church members, by world division, as though Adventists made up a global village of one hundred. In 1899, five of every six Seventh-day Adventists lived in North America. Nearly sixty years ago, in 1960, it was 26 of every hundred. Today it is six per cent. This is an extraordinary realization of our pioneers’ hopes, dreams, and faith. We have gone into all the world. While much still remains to be done, to finish the work Jesus gave to His followers, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has global foundations on which to draw as it seeks to reach the world for Christ.

Attendance. This is the fifth *Report* to include statistics on church attendance and it is important to note that not all regions of the world are currently counting attendance at Sabbath School and divine service. We hope, by the end of the quinquennium, that the published figures for attendance will be broadly accurate; but for the moment, though in some divisions counting is done comprehensively, total figures for attendance are not yet reliable in many unions and, consequently, in most divisions. We look forward to receiving and to publishing accurate numbers for the totals regularly attending Seventh-day Adventist church services, including Sabbath School.

A Seventh-day Adventist statistical archive consisting of past statistical reports, tables, and documents is available online at: www.adventiststatistics.org.

Dr. D. J. B. Trim

—Statistics within this report compiled by Kathleen Jones and Lisa Rasmussen.